

HEAVENLY SYMBOLS

LEVITICUS 6:8 – 7:10

We must never forget that the Bible's worldview is one where heaven and earth constantly interact with one another.

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Heavenly Symbols

Leviticus 6:8 – 7:10

We kind of finished the first major section in the book of Leviticus last time. In this first section, five types of sacrifices were described: The Burnt Offering, The Grain Offering, The Fellowship Offering, The Sin Offering, and The Guilt Offering. These were all described from the worshiper's perspective. In other words, these instructions were given to individual worshipers describing which type of sacrifice was acceptable for a specific type of situation.

This next section is going to focus on the priests who would be offering up these sacrifices on behalf of the worshipers. What is interesting to me is that our English title for the book we are studying is Leviticus. The title of the book would seem to indicate that the book is all about the priests and their priestly duties. However, only a small portion of the book deals directly with the priests. The section we are starting this morning, chapter 6 verse 8 through the end of chapter 11 will deal directly with the priests and later on chapters 21 and 22 will deal directly with the priests.

In this morning's text, we will look at the sacrifices that have been described in the first part of Leviticus now from the priestly point of view. The sacrifices will be described in the same order as they were already given with two exceptions. The first exception is that right after The Grain Offering is dealt with, there is a section dealing with the ordination of priests. The second exception is that The Fellowship Offering is taken out of order and saved for last. We will deal with that next time.

Since we have studied through these already, I am going to summarize them, but I would like to take a little bit of liberty and treat these as symbols. I know that we all look at the word symbol as if it is merely a sign that points to something. In other words, we believe that there is some actual thing and that a symbol merely points the way to the real thing.

Most of the time we don't even understand what our symbols mean in church. One day, I saw one of our kindergarteners talking with a few of his friends at the park. I kind of snuck over to see if I could eavesdrop a little. I heard the first kid say, "My name is Benjamin. I'm Jewish and this is the Star of David." The second kid said, "My name is Thomas. I'm Catholic and this is a crucifix." And then what came next stunned me. The kid from our church said, "My name is George. This is a box filled with bagels and doughnuts." I hope that more than meeting and eating characterize our church.

Our culture describes a symbol as a step removed from the reality it points to. However, the word symbol comes from Greek and it literally means to throw together. *Sym* means together. *Ballo* means to throw. I am using the word symbol to mean the throwing of two worlds together.

I would like to perhaps take a bit of liberty with this morning's text in order to remind us that all these worship regulations are meant to name the work and presence of God. The main idea of this morning's text is this. **WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT THE BIBLE'S WORLDVIEW IS ONE WHERE HEAVEN AND EARTH CONSTANTLY INTERACT WITH ONE ANOTHER.** Those of us who have been educated in the West have been taught to separate the natural world from the supernatural world. We have been taught that the natural world is real and the supernatural world is less than real. Further, even if there is some sort of reality attached to the supernatural world, it does not affect the natural world. However, the Bible describes the natural and supernatural worlds as constantly influencing, affecting and interacting with one another. For example, somehow, when innocent animals' blood was spilled, and when we take communion, we are all mysteriously plugged into the Last Supper, suffering, and death of Jesus. When Moses and Israel celebrated that First Passover night, when Jesus celebrated the Last Supper, and when we celebrate communion, all these worlds are thrown together. We must always keep in mind that God is not bound by space or time as we know it. Heaven operates on infinity and eternity. As we study through these verses this morning, I'd like for us to allow ourselves to be thrown into

eternity's time and space. The passage is nicely divided up into three sections. Each section starts out with the phrase, "The LORD said to Moses," This phrase appears in verses 8, 19, and 24.

I. SYMBOLS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (VS 8-18)

The Holy Spirit Manifested Himself In The Form Of Tongues Of Fire. Fire Can Comfort Or Burn.

Verses 8-18 remind us of symbols of the Holy Spirit. If you think about the birth of the church at Pentecost, which is The Festival Of Firstfruits, you will remember this. **THE HOLY SPIRIT MANIFESTED HIMSELF IN THE FORM OF TONGUES OF FIRE. FIRE CAN COMFORT OR BURN.**

A. FIRE (8-13)

There are several things about fire that remind us of God's Holy Spirit as described in verses 8-13.

1. THE LAST THING EVERY NIGHT (8-9)

In verses 8-9, God commanded the priests to offer up a burnt offering the last thing every night. As was described earlier, The Burnt Offering was to be completely burned up on the altar. Nothing was to be eaten. Before the priests finished their day, they had to stoke the fire on the altar and put the sacrifices on it so it would continue to burn all through the night. Since God the Holy Spirit lives in us, there is never a time we are without God's presence. The fire of God continually burns in us. The picture of Pentecost was this: The believers were praying in an upper room when the Holy Spirit, came. He appeared as a big flame that broke up into smaller flames and rested on each believer. After that, the believers started to speak in tongues. They went into the street and started preaching the Gospel. People from all over the world heard the Gospel being preached in his or her native tongue. Paul said that in response to God's love and mercies that we should offer ourselves up as living sacrifices. It will be a good exercise for us to ask the Holy Spirit to assist us in reviewing our day before we go to sleep at night. It is a good time to ask for forgiveness for our failures during the day and to place ourselves in God's hands for the night and for the next day.

2. THE CONSTANT REMINDER (10-11)

The sacrifices burned all through the night. Verses 10-11 go on to describe the constant reminder of God's presence in our lives. What happens here is interesting. The priest sets aside the clothes he offers worship sacrifices in. He puts on linen underwear and linen tunics. There are ashes from the sacrifices offered the day before left at the bottom of the altar. He cleaned up the ashes and put them in a pile next to the altar. Then he would change clothes again. At this point, he would gather up all the ashes and carry them to a place outside the camp that was ceremonially clean. After this, he would put back on his worship garments. I'm not really sure as to why God has them change clothes twice. Perhaps the significance is to remind us that fire is not only useful for cooking, for sacrificing, and keeping us warm. Fire is also dangerous. The ashes remind us that fire consumes things and reduces them to ashes. God approached the Israelites on Mt. Sinai in fire, lightning, and thunder. Later on in chapter 9 of Leviticus, God sends down fire to consume the sacrifice. This was a happy occasion in which God consumed the sacrifice as a sign of His love, mercy, forgiveness, and acceptance. On the other hand, God sent fire on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He reduced them to ashes. We will see further on in Leviticus where two priests are burned up at the altar because they disobeyed God. When Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit, they were killed on the spot. Perhaps the ashes are to remind us that we were

created from dust and we will return to dust. Ashes were a sign of repentance. The Bible portrays God as purifying fire. He burns off the impurity from our lives. Yes, we are created from dust and we will return to dust. However, there is a spiritual reality to our lives. God breathed life into us and the dust became living souls. In addition to this, the Bible portrays God the Holy Spirit taking up residence in our lives when we give ourselves to Jesus in faith. Further, the Holy Spirit is a constant reminder to us of our final salvation.

3. THE FIRST THING EVERY MORNING (12-13)

In verses 12-13, we see that the altar fire is the primary concern the first thing every morning. Again, we should submit ourselves to God when we first wake up each morning. We should offer ourselves for God's service. I think that attention to keeping the fire burning is clearly applicable to our relationship with the Holy Spirit. Listen to what the Apostle Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica:

¹⁶Be joyful always; ¹⁷pray continually; ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

¹⁹Do not put out the Spirit's fire; ²⁰do not treat prophecies with contempt. ²¹Test everything. Hold on to the good. ²²Avoid every kind of evil.

²³May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it" (I Thessalonians 5:16-24 / NIV).

Let me just emphasize what Paul said; "Do not put out the Spirit's fire." In fact, we are commanded to fan the fires of the Holy Spirit and of faith. We stoke the fires every day by committing ourselves to be joyful, prayerful, and thankful. We fan the flames of faith by seriously studying the Bible and obeying God's command. When we ignore the things of God, we put out the Spirit's fire. I think if we could keep this picture of priests keeping the altar fires burning constantly, we would be more careful to fan the flames of faith in our lives. Here in Leviticus God said through Moses, "The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out." In I Thessalonians God said through Paul, "Do not put out the Spirit's flame."

B. FIRSTFRUITS (14-18)

So fire plays an important part in recognizing the continuous work and presence of God the Holy Spirit in our lives. But the next type of sacrifice becomes the occasion for one of Israel's religious festivals. Verses 14-18 describe firstfruits. As we said before, the idea of the firstfruit offering was for the person to take the best portion of his or her first harvest.

1. GOD'S PORTION (14-15)

That brings us to God's portion as described in verses 14-15. This is to be the best of the first. Different types of offerings like the Sin Offering and the Ordination offering describe the amount of the grain as about one gallon. I'm not really sure how much the worshiper would bring for this particular grain offering. However, what is interesting is that God only commands that a handful of flour be offered up to Him. The priest is to mix the flour with incense and oil and burn them up on the altar. If you remember from earlier sermons, we said that oil often represents the Holy Spirit and that the rising incense graphically portrayed prayers and worship rising to God. The idea of firstfruits was a demonstration of the worshiper's thankfulness to God for His provision and care. Further, it was an acknowledgment that everything belongs to God. When we give a tenth of our money, time, and energy to God, what we are really saying is that all of our time, energy, and money all belong to God. We should always remember that when we give. We are only returning a portion of what really all belongs to God.

2. GOD'S PROVISION (16-17)

And that brings us to verses 16-17 where God's provision is described. There are several things that capture my mind here. First of all, the earth and everything in it belongs to God. And yet, He allows us to approach things as if they were ours. So for the worshiper, God gives her a bountiful harvest. Actually it belongs to God. But God only asks her to bring a tenth of the produce to Him. She is allowed to keep the remaining 90%. So God provides us with everything we need to live. He only asks that we return a tenth.

But what is even more interesting is that out of the entire offering, God only requires that He receive a handful of the flour. The rest He shares with the priests and their sons. And again, look at this in verse 17, God does not call the portion He receives as the most holy portion. He calls the portion He shares with the priests as the most holy portion. God has shared with us His One and Only Son Jesus. Jesus died for our sins. Further, God has shared His Holy Spirit with us. God has given us the most holy portions. God gave the priests very specific instructions on how and where to eat the portion He shared with them. It was to be eaten by the priests and their sons in the Worship Courtyard.

3. GOD'S PROTECTION (18)

Like we said several times before, verse 18 reminds us of God's protection. The phrase, "Whatever touches them will become holy," has sparked a lot of discussion. For example, if a person who was not a priest accidentally touched a part of the sacrifice, they became holy. So people would reason that just because someone touches something holy, how can that automatically make them holy? I think the problem is that we forget that the word holy means set apart for a particular purpose. When something becomes holy, that does not always mean it is a good thing. For example, the city of Jericho was set apart for destruction. Sacrifices were holy and they were burned up on the altar. When the Hebrews conquered Jericho, God commanded that everyone and everything be completely burned up.

Let me give another example of someone becoming holy and it wasn't such a good thing. No one except the Levite priests were ever to touch the Ark of the Covenant. While bringing the Ark to Jerusalem, the ox that was pulling the cart that was transporting the Ark stumbled. A man who was standing close to the cart saw the incident and reached out to prevent the Ark from falling off the cart and hitting the ground. That seemed like a really noble thing to do. The Ark was holy and the man became holy. Listen to what happens:

"⁶When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. ⁷The LORD'S anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God" (II Samuel 6:6-7 / NIV).

I know that society has a very permissive view of sex. However, in thinking about holiness, let me just read from Paul's letter to the Corinthians:

"¹⁸Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. ¹⁹Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (I Corinthians 6:18-20 / NIV).

Holiness is no joke. Here the Bible indicates that sexual sin is harmful in a way that no other sin is. The Holy Spirit lives in us. We must keep ourselves sexually pure. We also talked about how later in Paul's letter to these same Corinthians he said that many of them were getting sick and even dying because they were taking communion in an unworthy manner. Again, the communion was holy. When coming into contact with holiness we are set apart for either blessing or judgment. It is good to remember it this way. **THE HOLY SPIRIT MANIFESTED HIMSELF IN THE FORM OF TONGUES OF FIRE. FIRE CAN COMFORT OR BURN.**

II. SYMBOLS OF JESUS (VS 19-23)

Jesus Is The Promised Messiah Who Came To Save Us.

The fire and firstfruits seem to participate in the life of the Holy Spirit. In verses 19-23 we will see symbols of Jesus, God the Son. **JESUS IS THE PROMISED MESSIAH WHO CAME TO SAVE US.**

A. HIS ANOINTING (19-20a)

His anointing is anticipated by the anointing of priests in verses 19 and the first half of verse 20. There is a lot of discussion whether this applies to each individual priest or to just the high priest. The high priest was the ultimate intercessor between God and the people of Israel. On The Day Of Atonement, the high priest would take the sacrifice of Israel into the Holy Of Holies. If he came out alive, the sins of Israel were forgiven and they would enjoy the blessings of God for yet another year. The word here used for anointing is *mashach*. The word for the anointed one is *mashiyach*. The word messiah actually refers to the anointed one. Because of all the Hebrew prophecies that Jesus fulfilled, we claim Him to be the Promised Jewish Messiah. The person of the high priest participates in the intercessory nature of Jesus. Jesus came down to earth to die for our sins. In heaven, He now constantly intercedes for us in prayer.

B. HIS MINISTRY (20b-22a)

And that brings us to the second half of verse 20 through the first half of verse 22 where the ministry of Jesus is described. Since this is another type of Grain Offering, a gallon of the finest flour is brought for the offering. Bread cakes were baked. They were crushed and burned up. Half of the bread was burned up with the first early morning Burnt Offering Sacrifice and the rest of it was burned up at night with the last Burnt Offering Sacrifice. In the book of Numbers chapter 28, it seems as if this sacrifice was offered up every morning and every evening with the Burnt Offering. We know that Jesus was crushed for our sin. We also know that He was crucified and shed His blood for us. Think about the significance of the Burnt Offering Sacrifice offered together with the Grain Offering every morning and every night. When Jesus celebrated The Last Supper,

²³... on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."²⁵In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."²⁶For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (I Corinthians 11:23-26 / NIV)

Just as the morning and evening sacrifices reminded the Israelites of their relationship with God and the high priest of his ministry of intercession, we are to remind ourselves and one another of the ministry of Jesus on our behalf. Communion is a time in which we are to recall all of this.

C. HIS SACRIFICE (22b-23)

And the second half of verse 22 through verse 23 describes the nature of His sacrifice. Usually in grain offerings and other types of offerings, the priest was given a portion to eat. In the case of the Burnt Offerings and this particular type of Grain Offering, nothing is kept for the priests. It is to be totally consumed on the altar. For one, the priest should never be able to profit from his own sacrifice. What follows here is very interesting. The son of the high priest is the one who prepares the bread sacrifice. Keep in mind, none of it is eaten and it is totally consumed.

Jesus is God's Son, His One and Only Son. Jesus prepared the sacrifice. In fact Jesus was the sacrifice. He was totally consumed to death in making atonement for us. And now, we eat the sacrifice, which is His body in the celebration of communion. Isn't all of that fascinating? I think so and I think it is another reason why I believe **JESUS IS THE PROMISED MESSIAH WHO CAME TO SAVE US.**

III. SYMBOLS OF THE FATHER (VS 6:24-7:10)

There Is Only One God. He Has Clearly Instructed Us How To Be In A Right Relationship With Him.

We have seen the participation of God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in these sacrifices. In verse 24 through chapter 7 verse 10, we will encounter the symbolism of God the Father. The message here is this. **THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD. HE HAS CLEARLY INSTRUCTED US HOW TO BE IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.**

A. KEEPING HIS PLACE HOLY (24-30)

Since God is holy and He lives in the center of the camp, it would be necessary to keep His place holy as provided for in verses 24-30. Before we go on here, it's important to review what we said about the difference between The Sin Offering and The Guilt Offering. The Sin Offering recognizes that sin pollutes the individual, the people who surrounds him, and the community. If God is going to continue to live among His people, then the place must be clean. We said that when God in all His perfection and holiness comes near to sinful people, it is always a dangerous situation. This sacrifice is meant to bring back purity to the individual and the community. The Guilt Offering will have to do more with bringing restoration to relationships and ensuring that justice governs the community.

1. GOD'S FORGIVENESS (24-25)

In verses 24-25 we are reminded about the necessity of God's forgiveness. This is all about purification. Sin dirties us, the people around us, and the community we are part of. For those of us who attend Devon Church, when we sin, we not only pollute our individual lives, our personal sin pollutes the lives of our family, friends, and our church. When the worshiper laid her hands on the sacrificial animal and slit its throat, she was reminded that the blood that was gathered by the priest and splashed against the altar should be hers. We often quote the verse:

"⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9 / NIV).

It is a great verse and it is true. But we often forget what is behind it. The fact is that when we confess our sins, God does forgive us and purify us. However, it is only because of the incredible suffering, the spilling of Christ's blood, and His horrific death on our behalf that we are able to be forgiven and purified. I am sure that we take sin too lightly and don't spend much time thinking about why it is we can be forgiven and what it cost God personally to purify us. If the blood of Jesus were not constantly applied to our lives, we would be dead since God lives in us and cannot tolerate any impurity.

2. GOD'S PROVISION (26-29)

Verses 26-29 to go on and describe God's provision. Again, a portion of the animal is burnt up in sacrifice. The rest is given to the priest for him to eat. Again, let me just make an aside comment about holiness here in these verses. The meat must be eaten by a priest and the future priests, i.e. his sons, in the holy place. It cannot leave the worship area. Even the garments that

are spattered with the blood of sacrifices must be washed in the worship area. They are holy. It would be good for us to remember that God has provided us with spiritual gifts, natural talents and abilities, time, money, energy, influence, and opportunities. We are holy and we should live our lives as constantly in a state of worship. In other words, God has made us priests to one another and to the lost. Every place we go now is holy because the Holy God of the Universe lives in us. It is something for us to consciously think about. God has graciously provided for us. How are we using our provisions?

3. GOD'S HOLINESS (30)

And again in verse 30 we are reminded of God's holiness. This is interesting. If you think back, we can remember that when the priest sinned or the community as a whole was guilty of sin, the blood was not just splashed at the altar. The blood had to be taken into the worship tent and sprinkled there. This animal could not be eaten. The entire animal had to be burned up on the altar. We church leaders must be extremely careful how we live our lives because our sin has more devastating consequences. And we as a church family must be very careful not to be prejudiced in any way. We must be very careful to care for the poor and disadvantaged. We must be careful to make sure all are treated fairly.

B. KEEPING HIS PEOPLE HOLY (7:1-10)

So the first part of purity was to ensure that the place was purified. The second part is described in chapter 7 verses 1-10. God made a way to keep His people holy. In other words, we are not simply a collection of individuals. We are a community. We are a spiritual family. God has made us responsible to one another.

1. GOD'S PROVISION FOR HIS PEOPLE (1-5)

Verses 1-5 describe God's provision for His people. This sacrifice is called The Guilt Offering. These verses describe how the priest has to sprinkle the blood on the altar but we learned before that this sacrifice has everything to do with restitution. We said that Jesus emphasized the fact of making restitution for the damage we have caused by our sin. Restitution can come in the form of money, service, apologies and forgiveness. In the Hebrew community and in the worldview of Jesus, one cannot worship until he or she has made restitution where possible and acknowledged the inability to fix much of the damage done. Perhaps if we thought about the fact we would have to fix the damage we do by sinning, then we may not sin as much. Remember the Hebrews had added on 20% to the restitution. For sure God wants us to know that sin does not pay.

2. GOD'S PROVISION FOR HIS PRIESTS (6-10)

In verses 6-10 we again see God's provision for His priests. Again, the priest who offers up the sacrifice for the worshiper is entitled to eat the leftovers. In God's case though, He makes sure the leftovers are more than He takes for Himself. Whenever we give of our time, energy, and money to God, we will find out that we can never out-give Him. It seems to me that God wants us to know that He is pure, holy, and dangerous. And yet He longs to be in a relationship with us. And so that is why He has given us the Bible. **THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD. HE HAS CLEARLY INSTRUCTED US HOW TO BE IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.**

IV. EPILOGUE

I would like for us to start to embrace the truth that spiritual realities are just as “real” as the reality of the natural world. What happens in the spiritual realm affects what happens in the natural realm and what we do in the natural realm affects the spiritual realm. Symbols are important. **WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT THE BIBLE’S WORLDVIEW IS ONE WHERE HEAVEN AND EARTH CONSTANTLY INTERACT WITH ONE ANOTHER.**

Like the Hebrew priests, God has given us many provisions and many opportunities to minister. And like symbols, we can often minister without saying a word. A friend emailed me this story:

"A member of a certain church, who previously had been attending services regularly, stopped going. After a few weeks, the pastor decided to visit him. It was a chilly evening. The pastor found the man at home alone, sitting before a blazing fire. Guessing the reason for his pastor’s visit, the man welcomed him, led him to a comfortable chair near the fireplace and waited.

The pastor made himself at home but said nothing. In the grave silence, he contemplated the dance of the flames around the burning logs. After some minutes, the pastor took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember and placed it to one side of the hearth all alone. Then he sat back in his chair, still silent. The host watched all this in quiet contemplation. As the one lone ember’s flame flickered and diminished, there was a momentary glow and then its fire was no more. Soon it was cold and dead.

Not a word had been spoken since the initial greeting. The pastor glanced at his watch and realized it was time to leave. He slowly stood up, picked up the cold, dead ember and placed it back in the middle of the fire. Immediately it began to glow, once more with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it.

As the pastor reached the door to leave, his host said with a tear running down his cheek, 'Thank you so much for your visit and especially for the fiery sermon. I shall be back in church next Sunday.'

We live in a world today, which tries to say too much with too little. Consequently, few listen. Sometimes the best sermons are the ones left unspoken."

What we say and do affects our friends, our family, and our church community. Even though we walk in a natural world, what we do has consequences in the supernatural world as well. We constantly inhabit two realities: the natural and the supernatural. What we do and say have consequences for our eternal destinies and the eternal destinies of others.